

*New leadership, not rhetoric is needed on Iraq and domestic agenda*

Washington, DC -- In response to the President's "State of the Union" address, Rep. Peter Welch issued the following statement:

"The people of this country are ready for a change in direction. Tonight, the President offers only the rhetoric of change.

"President Bush's actions of the last six years speak louder than his words tonight. Rather than making bipartisan progress toward a new direction, he has taken us in the wrong direction, from our diminished standing in the world to a domestic agenda that has forgotten the middle class.

"There is no more immediate need than a change of course in Iraq. Regrettably, the President stubbornly clings to a dangerous and misguided policy of escalation, disregarding the advice of his military advisors, the will of the American people, the sound advice of the Iraq Study Committee, and a growing bipartisan consensus in Congress.

"And while repeatedly making pledges to expand health care coverage and contain costs, the number of uninsured Americans steadily climbs year after year. After declaring our nation is 'addicted to oil' a year ago, he held steadfastly to a dead-end 'drill our way out' energy policy that short-changed alternative energy.

"The President talks about a change in domestic policy, but he has failed to deliver.

"If the President is serious about a domestic agenda to help working Americans, the Democratic Congress is ready to work with him to accomplish real change.

"If he is not, the Democratic Congress will be providing the leadership Vermonters and Americans want and deserve. In our first 100 hours, we have made a down payment on our promise for change by raising the minimum wage, adopting the terrorism prevention measures

outlined by the 9-11 commission, cutting interest rates for college, making prescription drugs more affordable, and slashing subsidies for large oil companies.

"For the good of the country, we will continue to lead where our President has failed."